Your notes

GCSE History: revision notes

Anglo-Saxon and Norman England, c1060–88

Contents

1. Anglo-Saxon England
2. The succession crisis of 1066
3. William in power, 1066–1087
4. Key terms
5. Quick questions
6. What to do next

Anglo-Saxon England

- Society: the king at the top; **earls** governed earldoms; **thegns** were local lords who owed military service; **ceorls** were free peasants; and about 10% of people were slaves.
- Government: the **Witan** (the king's council) advised the king. England was divided into shires, each with a **sheriff**, and smaller hundreds. The king could call up the **fyrd** (a part-time army) and had his own housecarls (professional soldiers). Taxes (the geld) and coins were well organised. Burhs were fortified towns.
- The Godwins were the most powerful family. Harold Godwinson was **Earl** of Wessex, and his brother Tostig was **Earl** of Northumbria until a rebellion in 1065 led Edward to exile him.

The succession crisis of 1066

- Edward the Confessor died childless on 5 January 1066, and the **Witan** chose Harold Godwinson as king.
- William of Normandy claimed Edward had promised him the throne (in 1051) and that Harold had sworn an oath to support him (in 1064). Harald Hardrada of Norway based his claim on an earlier agreement. Edgar Atheling had royal blood but was young.
- In 1066 came Gate Fulford (20 September), Stamford Bridge (25 September) and Hastings (14 October). William won with cavalry, archers and feigned retreats, helped by Harold's tired army, his decision to fight quickly, and luck.

© LycoLearn · lycolearn.co.uk · Free GCSE and KS3 revision

William in power, 1066–1087

- The surviving English leaders submitted to William at Berkhamsted, and he was crowned on Christmas Day 1066. He built castles, rewarded his followers with land, and set up **Marcher earldoms** along the Welsh border (Hereford, Shrewsbury and Chester).
- Rebellions: Edwin and Morcar (1068); risings in the north (1069), followed by the Harrying of the North (1069–70); Hereward the Wake at Ely (1070–71); and the Revolt of the **Earls** (1075), led by Ralph de Gael, Roger de Breteuil and Waltheof, who was executed in 1076.
- Changes: the feudal system; church reform under Lanfranc, after Archbishop Stigand was removed in 1070; the Domesday Book (1086); forest law; and a Norman aristocracy replacing the Anglo-Saxon one.
- Family problems: William's eldest son, Robert Curthose, rebelled (1077–80) and wounded his father at Gerberoy (1079). William's half-brother, Odo of Bayeux, was arrested in 1082. William died in September 1087.

Key terms

Earl	A powerful noble who governed a large area called an earldom.
Thegn	A local lord who owed the king military service.
Ceorl	A free peasant.
Witan	The king's council of leading nobles and churchmen.
Fyrd	A part-time army of free men.
Housecarl	A professional soldier serving the king or an earl.
Burh	A fortified Anglo-Saxon town.
Sheriff	The king's official in charge of a shire.
Marcher earldom	An earldom on the Welsh border, given to a trusted Norman.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. What was the Witan?
2. What was the fyrd?
3. Who were the thegns?
4. Which family was the most powerful in England before 1066?
5. Why was Tostig exiled in 1065?
6. What was William's claim to the English throne?
7. Where did the English leaders submit to William in 1066?

Your notes

8. What were the Marcher earldoms?

Answers

1. The king's council of leading nobles and churchmen
2. A part-time army of free men
3. Local lords who owed military service
4. The Godwins
5. Northumbria rebelled against him
6. Edward had promised it to him, and Harold had sworn an oath to support him
7. Berkhamsted
8. Earldoms on the Welsh border given to trusted Normans

What to do next

Practise 12 questions on this topic

Try 4 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

Free revision for GCSE and KS3 at lycolearn.co.uk. Some notes are for one exam board only, and say so in brackets.

Your notes